

**Ethnic Studies Review Volume 22**

**Alaina Lemon. *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Post-Socialism*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press). lx, 308 pp., \$18.95 paper.**

When most people hear the word “Gypsy,” images are automatically conjured up of nomadic caravans of colorfully attired, swarthy-complected romantic souls, accompanied, of course, by the mournful strains of a violin. Others think of fortune tellers, confidence swindlers, even nefarious home improvement crews, painting driveways with black paint and charging for blacktopping. Whichever stereotype comes to mind, it is the conjurer’s assertion that this is the real thing, the authentic reality of Gypsy life.

Perhaps we could be forgiven for thinking that in the former Soviet Union such stereotypes wouldn’t be perpetuated without the commercial media industry that often feeds the image-making machine in the “free world.” This was not the case, as Alaina Lemon so ably depicts in *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romanic Memory from Pushkin to Post-Socialism*. Her years of fieldwork with various groups of Rom in Russia detail a century’s worth of image crafting based upon stereotypes held by both Russian “audience” and Rom “actor.” The result is a laudable volume on the twin meanings of the term “performance” in the contemporary experience of the groups Lemon studied.

The Moscow Romani Theater is the centerstage of this drama, a setting for Rom intellectuals to perform works acceptable to the old Soviet regime. That the intellectuals and indeed most of the informant groups in Lemon’s book have not been nomadic since well before settlement became the law in the 1950s underpins her premise. Many of the Rom of *Between Two Fires* have more in common with other Russians than they do with stereotypic Gypsies of romantic plays. However, a number express the Russian view that settled Rom who do not maintain the old customs are not authentic Gypsies.

The basic theme of the book is that phenomenon known as “negotiating ethnicity.” The Romani who wished to have economic security under the socialist system could do so by playing up to the notions Russians had of them. Although

Russian society held Gypsies of this type in contempt, they could enjoy Rom enacting a contrived culture for their entertainment. Lemon notes in the introduction that this closely parallels the experience of African-Americans in past decades whose only entre to success in the dominant culture was through entertainment or athletics.

The Rom of the Moscow Romani Theater also seem to have much in common with the Yiddish Theater tradition, with the exception that Yiddish theater was directed at an Eastern European Jewish audience. Likewise, in the negotiation of Rom cultural identity it appears the closest parallel in the U.S. is that of the Native American. Even today there remains a prejudice that those American Indians who do not look or act Indian (in highly stereotypic terms) are somehow not authentic.

Given the "performance" (i.e. dramaturgy) context of *Between Two Fires*, this book should appeal to a variety of ethnic studies scholars. It gives a unique insight into a little-understood group and offers food for thought about the role of projecting image for virtually any ethnic minority.

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**Jan Lin. *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclaves and Global Change*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). Xix, 248pp., \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.**

In contemporary economic globalization with its cross-border flows of labor and capital, advanced and less advanced economies have become more integrated, and in certain respects the former have become more similar to the latter. For example, major American and European "global cities" such as New York and London have seen the growth of a lower economic sector of low paying, labor intensive manufacturing and service work alongside an upper economic sector of international financial and corporate activity. This dual conceptualization of cities is the framework Jan Lin uses to examine the influence of macro level global forces on economic and social